

R 300929Z MAR 98
FM AMEMBASSY BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7707
INFO ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS

UNCLAS BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 000209

DEPT FOR EAP/PIMBS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SULTAN'S SON TO BE MADE CROWN PRINCE

1. AN ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE ON THURSDAY, MARCH 26, STATED THAT THE SULTAN'S ELDEST SON, PRINCE AL-MUHTADEE BILLAH, WILL BE CROWNED "PUTERA MAKHOTA" OR CROWN PRINCE, AT A CEREMONY TO BE HELD IN AUGUST.

2. THE CEREMONY IS EXPECTED TO BE LARGE AND LAVISH, STEEPED IN TRADITION, WITH A PROCESSION THROUGH THE TOWN CENTER, AND GUESTS FROM ASEAN AND AROUND THE WORLD WILL BE INVITED TO ATTEND.

3. COMMENT. WHILE THE CONFERRING OF THE TITLE "PUTERA MAKHOTA" ON PRINCE BILLAH BY SULTAN HASSNAL BOLKIAH CONFIRMS THAT BILLAH WILL SUCCEED HIM, THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO INDICATION THAT THE SULTAN INTENDS TO ABDICATE IN BILLAH'S FAVOR, A PRECEDENT SET BY THE SULTAN'S OWN FATHER, SULTAN OMAR ALI SAIFUDDIEN, WHO STEPPED DOWN IN 1967. MOST BRUNELANS BELIEVE THAT THE SULTAN WILL CONTINUE TO REIGN FOR MANY YEARS TO COME, BUT THAT PRINCE BILLAH WILL BEGIN TO REPRESENT THE SULTAN AT SOME OF HIS MANY OFFICIAL ENGAGEMENTS WITHIN BRUNEI. END COMMENT.

RASE